The ART OF ARTHUR STREETON

BERKELOUW BOOKDEALERS SYDNEY

THE ART OF ARTHUR STREETON

1,500 copies of this edition
have been printed.

PLATE I.
35½in. x 29½in

The Hawkesbury River, N.S.W.
In the possession of J. R. McGregor, Esq., Sydney.

THE ART OF ARTHUR STREETON

SPECIAL NUMBER OF
ART IN AUSTRALIA

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INTRODUCTION

BY JULIAN ASHTON

IN the early part of 1890 the late Mr. E. L. Montefiore and I visited Melbourne by direction of the Trustees of the N.S.W. National Gallery to inspect a collection of British art in the Exhibition Building, and make purchases if we deemed it advisable. We cordially agreed on the acquisition of Melton Fisher's "Venetian Cafe," but differed as to the advisability of purchasing "Oyster Fishing—Essex," by E. Waterlow, R.A., priced at £250. No decision had been reached when we left the Building, and I was returning along Collins Street to my hotel when I met the late Fred. McCubbin who asked me to visit a show of the Victorian Artists' Society, on Eastern Hill. "There is," he said, "a picture by a young man named Arthur Streeton, a lithographer, which will, I think, greatly interest you." I went with him and saw the picture. It was a fine performance and was valued at the modest sum of seventy pounds.

Next morning, when I met him at the Exhibition Building, Mr. Montefiore again urged the purchase of "Oyster Fishing—Essex." After some demur I suggested a compromise: if he would agree to the purchase of Streeton's picture, I would fall in with his views about Waterlow's. We went together to the Eastern Hill Exhibition, and my proposal was accepted. The result was that the National Art Gallery of New South Wales became possessed of "Still Glides the Stream and Shall for ever Glide," which, though it lacks the brilliancy of Arthur Streeton's later manner, is, I venture to say, one of his most typical and poetical Australian pictures.

It was shortly after this that Streeton came to Sydney. Tall, slim, blue-eyed, with the faint promise of a golden beard, full of jests, and tags from Shelley and Keats, he took his place among us, a devotee under the spell of Sydney and its beautiful Harbour. With amazing industry, and an ever-increasing facility, he produced a variety of studies, all distinct and clear-cut cameos of the bays, the foreshores, the headlands and their reflections, and all bearing a truthful suggestion of Australian foliage and colour which remains almost unrivalled up to the present time.

Streeton and Roberts started teaching, but not too seriously, in the buildings of the Commercial Union Insurance Co., Hunter Street, opposite the "Herald" Office, and from there they headed an insurrection against the Art Society. They held their first exbition, under the name of "The Society of Artists," in a skating rink in York Street.

I saw Streeton fairly often at this time. He lived in a camp at Little Sirius Cove, Mosman, where he was joined later on by Tom Roberts. He used to do the marketing, and on arriving at the Musgrave Street wharf had to walk around the point and blow a whistle for the boat to come across from the camp. To see him returning on Saturday nights, laden with parcels of bread, beer and beef, and as merry the while as a boy at a picnic, was a delight. In those days the painters' material wants were few, but their hopes were unbounded.

He was cheerful and fond of company, and seemed to be quite uninterested in theories about art, but preoccupied with the task of representing in terms of paint the beauty of the scenes before him. If an argument about art started in the camp, Streeton would make a jest of it, walking up and down and shouting: "Apples, Oranges and Lemonade." He joined with Roberts and myself in many a fierce bout with the old Art Society in the hope of widening its point of view, but he never lost his temper over them as many of us did. Indeed, it seemed to me that he never felt that theories about art, or the administration of art societies, really mattered. His nature was that of a fresh, breezy, care-free youth who revelled in the beauty of his country, and whose highest ambition was to paint it as faithfully as he could. His colour sense was not subtle, but he was warmly appreciative of the general features of Australian colouration, and by hard continuous training his hand answered readily to every suggestion of colour that he saw before him.

I often went out sketching with him, and no one was ever more completely absorbed, or more forgetful of the life around him, than Arthur Streeton when he sat down to place some beautiful scene upon his small canvas. Many times he fell upon lean days

—they were, unfortunately, only too common with Australian artists in the nineties—but I never knew hardship or lack of money to depress him, nor did he ever lose hope that he would eventually be successful.

In those days buyers of pictures were as rare as dodos, but youth, enthusiasm, and pure joy in the beauty around us more than made up for the lack of patronage. The National Galleries of Sydney and Melbourne were the principal purchasers, but it was some time before their Trustees recognized the quality of Streeton's work. When Streeton turned from "little gems" to larger canvases, the Sydney Gallery Trustees in succeeding years purchased "Fire's On" and "The Cremorne Pastoral," the Melbourne Gallery acquired "The Purple Noon's Transparent Light," while "The Hawkesbury" fell into the hands of a private collector. The last two are the high-water mark of Streeton's achievement in his larger Australian canvases.

In 1897 Streeton migrated to England, as so many of our talented sons have done, and Australia sustained a loss which it would be difficult to overestimate. His comprehension of the spirit of his native land, if somewhat superficial, still leaves him without a peer in directness and certainty of touch.

Streeton has undoubtedly been a powerful influence, not only upon the work of his contemporaries, but upon many a budding artist who will eventually add lustre to his craft. And that influence has been a purely wholesome one. He was not troubled with any of the deep underlying problems of paint; the outward aspects of nature in sunlight were all he sought, and the mastery of a technique which would suggest these qualities in the simplest, most direct and natural manner was what he most seriously desired. He was on the high road to so great a success when he decided to shift his viewpoint to an alien soil, that his technique, even then, almost amounted to a tradition. But on that foreign soil, so saturated with formulas, his true purpose could not be fulfilled. For all that, he takes high rank in the small band of Australians who have gained recognition for Australian art in the older civilizations of the world.

PLATE II.

The Old Friendly Society's Gardens, Melbourne.
An example of Streeton's earliest work.
Painted in 1886.
In the possession of M. McMichael, Esq. Melbourne.

PLATE III.
30in. x 19in.

The Selector's Hut.
In the possession of Miss Johnson, Melbourne.

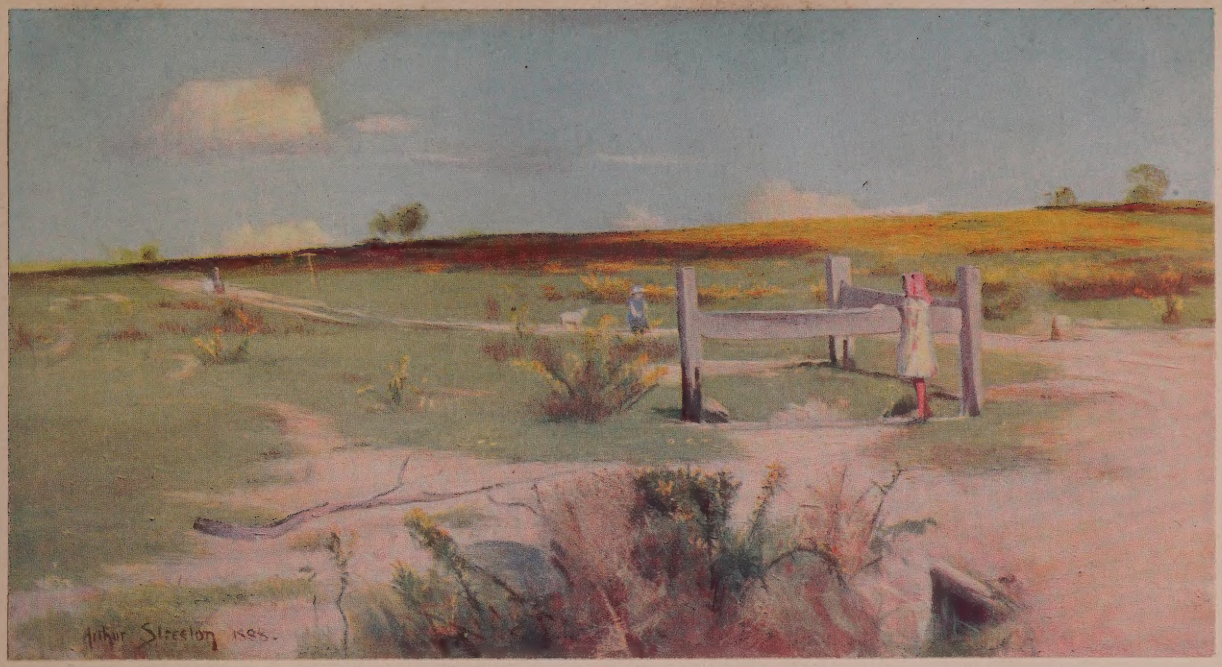

PLATE IV.
36in. x 20in.

Gorse in Bloom—Box Hill, Vic.
In the possession of J. H. Connell, Esq., Melbourne.

PLATE V.
24in. x 16in.

Redfern Railway Station.
Painted in 1893.
In the possession of Leonard Dodds, Esq., Sydney.

PLATE VI.
59in. x 31½ins.

Still Glides the Stream
and Shall for ever Glide.
In the possession of
The National Art Gallery of N.S.W.

PLATE VII.
18in. x 12in.

The Hot Road.
In the possession of Sir Baldwin Spencer, Melbourne.

PLATE VIII.
52in. x 35in.

Cremorne Pastoral.
In the possession of
The National Art Gallery of N.S.W.

PLATE IX.
59in. x 31in.

Gloucester Buckets.
In the possession of
The National Art Gallery of N.S.W.

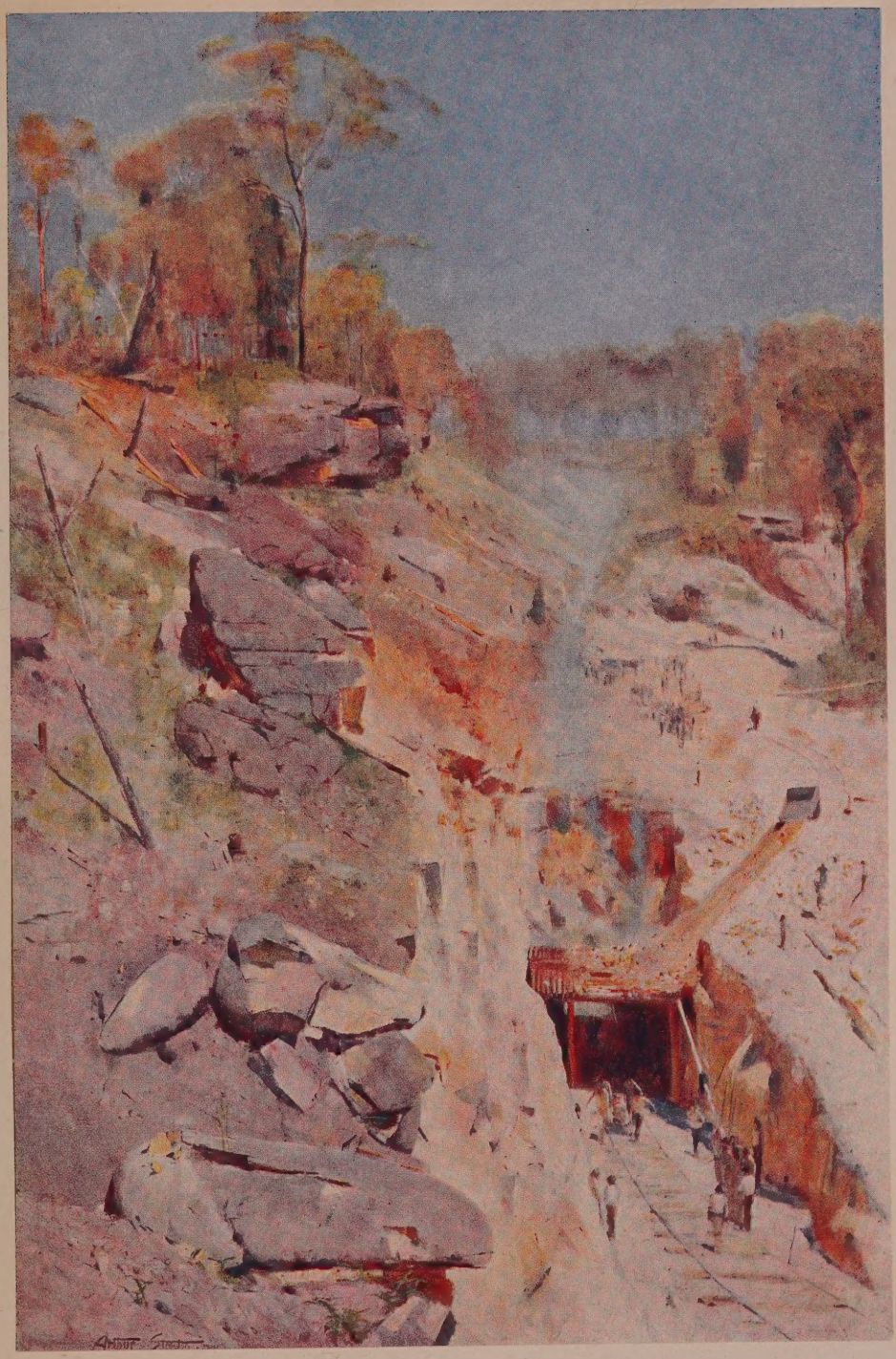

PLATE X.
72in x 47in.

Fire's On.
In the possession of
The National Art Gallery of N.S.W.

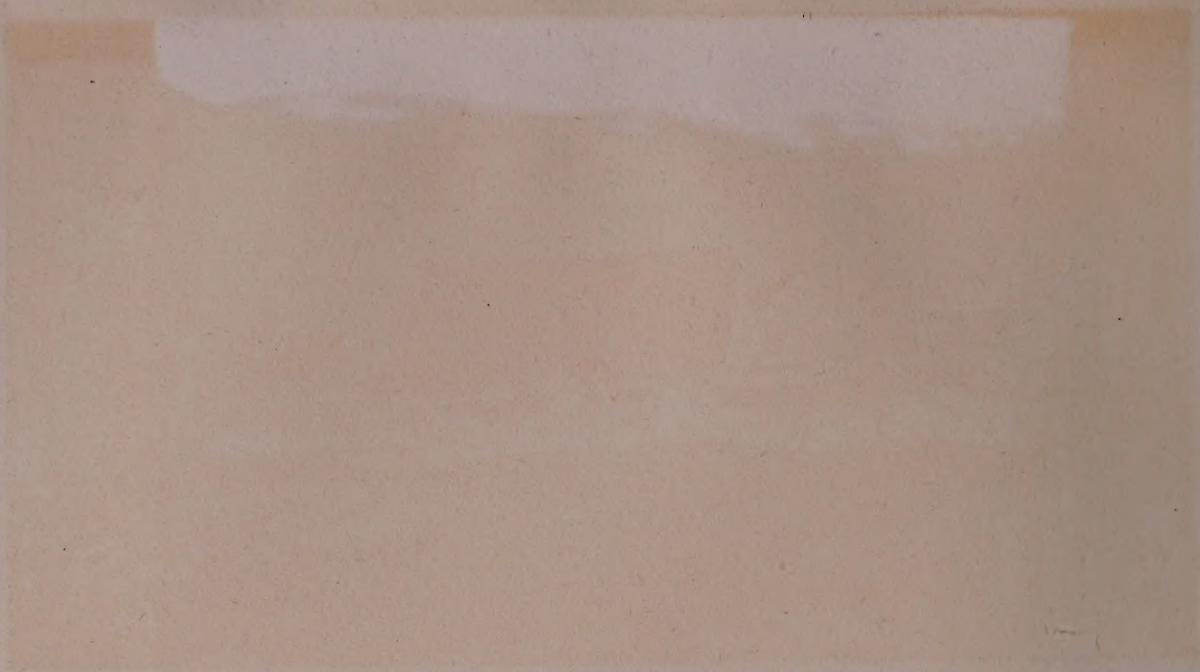

PLATE XI.
24in. x 13in.

Surveyor's Camp.
In the possession of
The National Art Gallery of N.S.W.

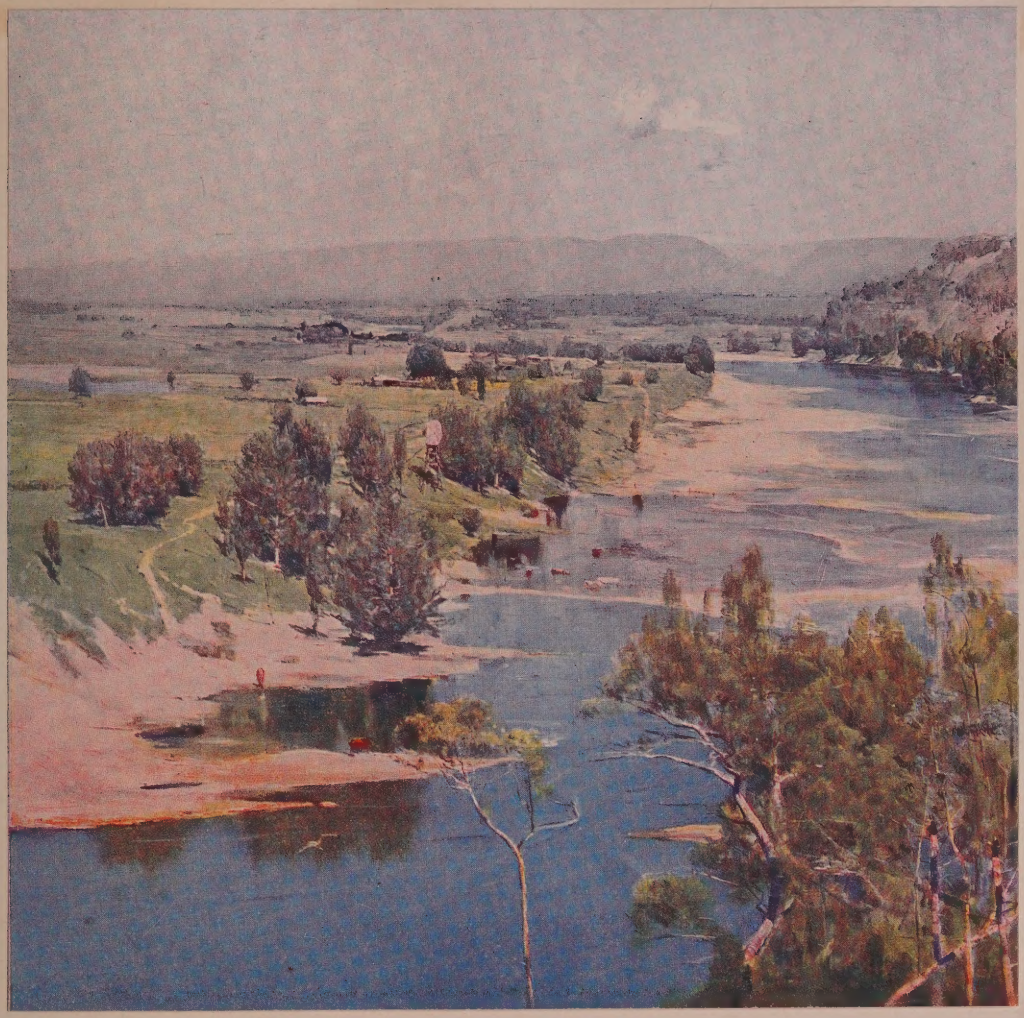

PLATE XII.
48in. x 48in.

The Purple Noon's Transparent Light.
In the possession of
The National Art Gallery of Victoria.

PLATE XIII.
30in. x 20in.

Coogee—Sydney.
In the possession of J. R. McGregor, Esq., Sydney.

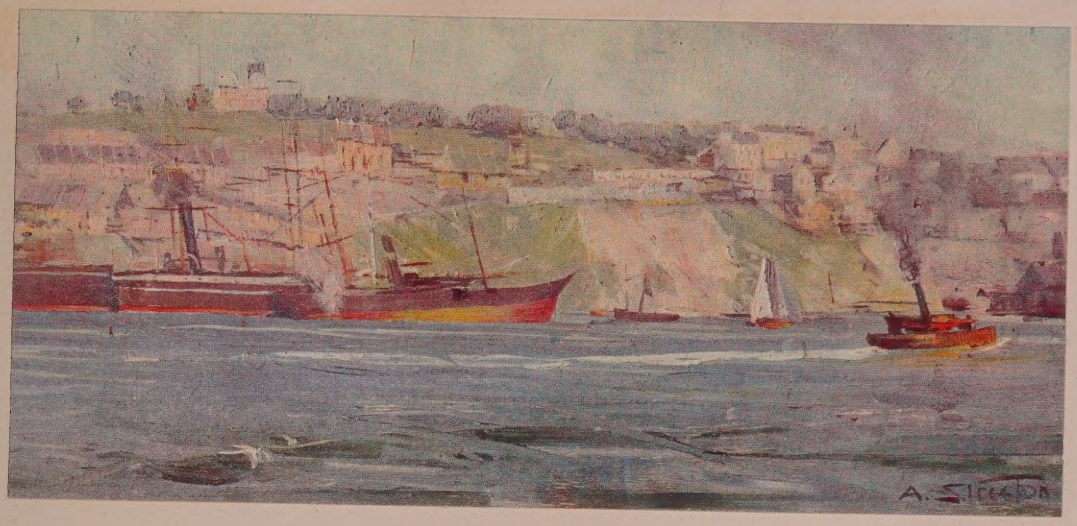

PLATE XIV.
18in. x 8¼in.

Observatory Hill—Sydney Harbour.
In the possession of Leonard Dodds, Esq., Sydney.

PLATE XV.
25½in, x 6¾in.

Cremorne.
In the possession of Howard Hinton, Esq., Sydney.

PLATE XVI.
25½in. x 6¾in.

Mosman's Bay.
In the possession of Howard Hinton, Esq., Sydney.

PLATE XVII.
25½in. x 6¾in.

Sydney Harbour, from Cremorne.
In the possession of Howard Hinton, Esq., Sydney.

PLATE XVIII.

The Rain Cloud.
In the possession of J. H. Connell, Esq., Melbourne.

PLATE XIX.
24in. x 48in.

Sydney Harbour across Cremorne.
In the possession of Sir Baldwin Spencer, Melbourne.

PLATE XX.
29in. x 19in.

The Burned Back-Ranges.
In the possession of C. Lloyd Jones, Esq., Sydney.

PLATE XXI.
18in. x 14in.

Landscape.
In the possession of Dr. Felix Meyer, Melbourne.

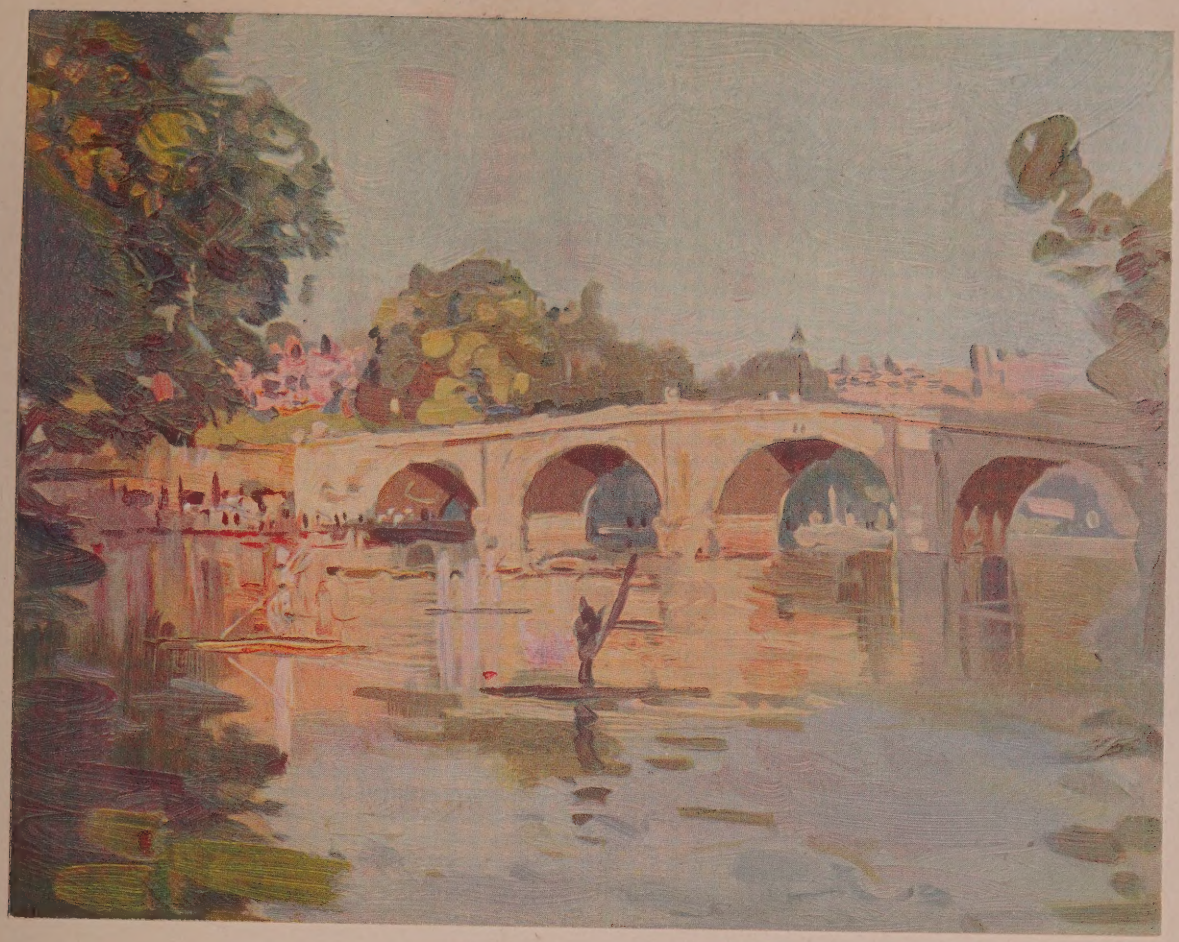

PLATE XXII.
9in. x 7in.

Richmond Bridge, Thames.
In the possession R. D. Elliott, Esq., Melbourne.

PLATE XXIII.
30in. x 20in.

Chepstowe Castle.
In the possession of C. L. Pinchof, Esq., Melbourne.

PLATE XXIV.
14½in. x 21in.

Thames and St. Pauls.
In the possession of Sir Baldwin Spencer, Melbourne.

PLATE XXV.
48in. x 48in.

Centre of the Empire.
In the possession of Sir Baldwin Spencer, Melbourne.

PLATE XXVI.

Venetian Canal
In the possession of Gayfield Shaw, Esq.,
Sydney.

PLATE XXVII.
24in. x 20in.

The Fete.

PLATE XXVIII.
12¼in. x 9½in.

Corfe Castle.
In the possession of Peter Waite, Esq., Adelaide.

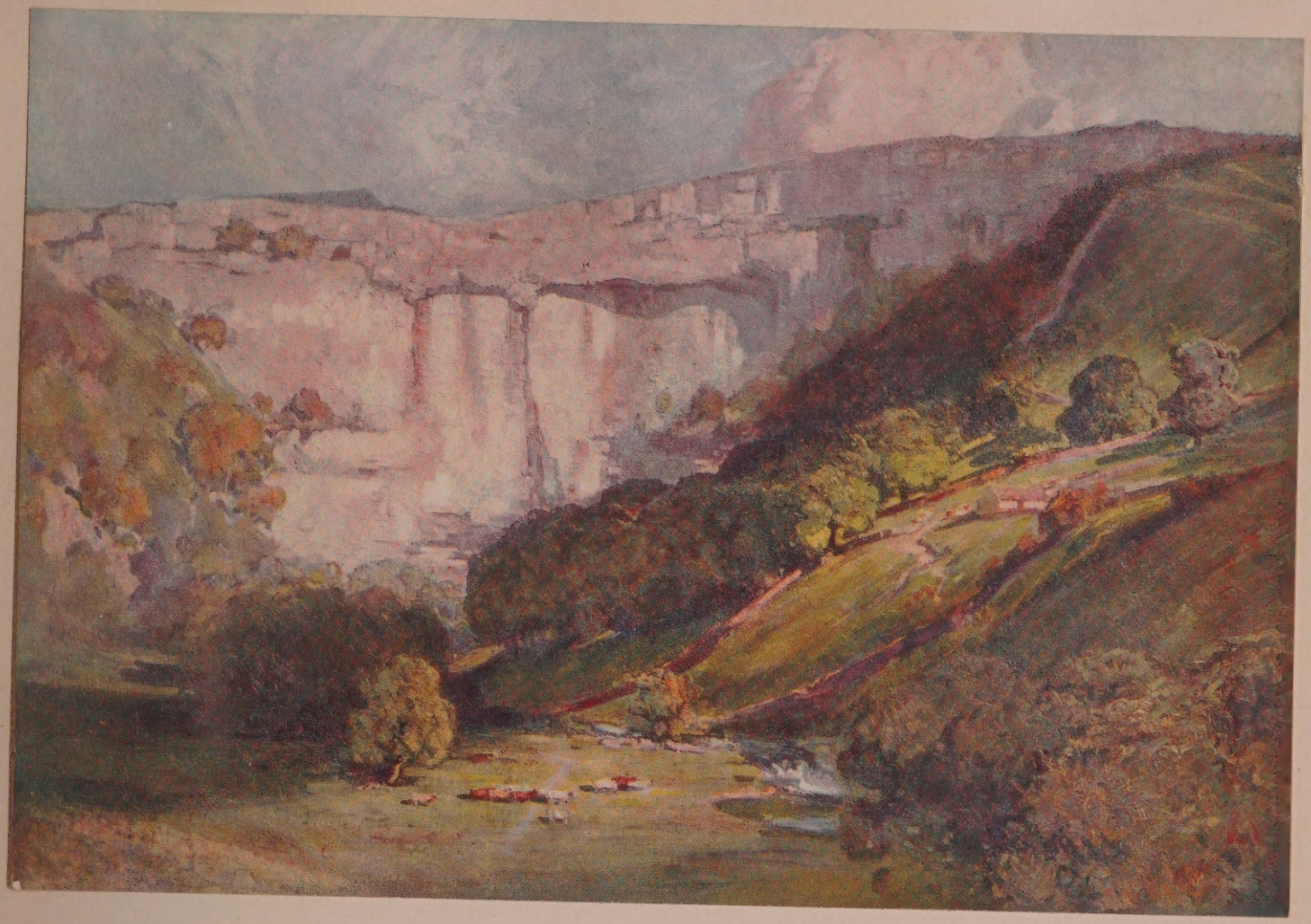

PLATE XXIX.
6ft. 3in. x 4ft. 3in.

Malham Cove.
In the possession of
The National Art Gallery of N.S.W.

PLATE XXX.
30in. x 20½in.

Chelsea Barges.
In the possession of
The National Art Gallery of Victoria.

PLATE XXXI.
18in. x 12in.

The Thames at Battersea.
In the possession of Leonard Dodds, Esq., Sydney.

PLATE XXXII.
9in. x 7in.

The Thames.
In the possession of H. Dunstan Vane, Esq., Sydney.

PLATE XXXIII.
36in. x 30in.

Kelso Abbey.

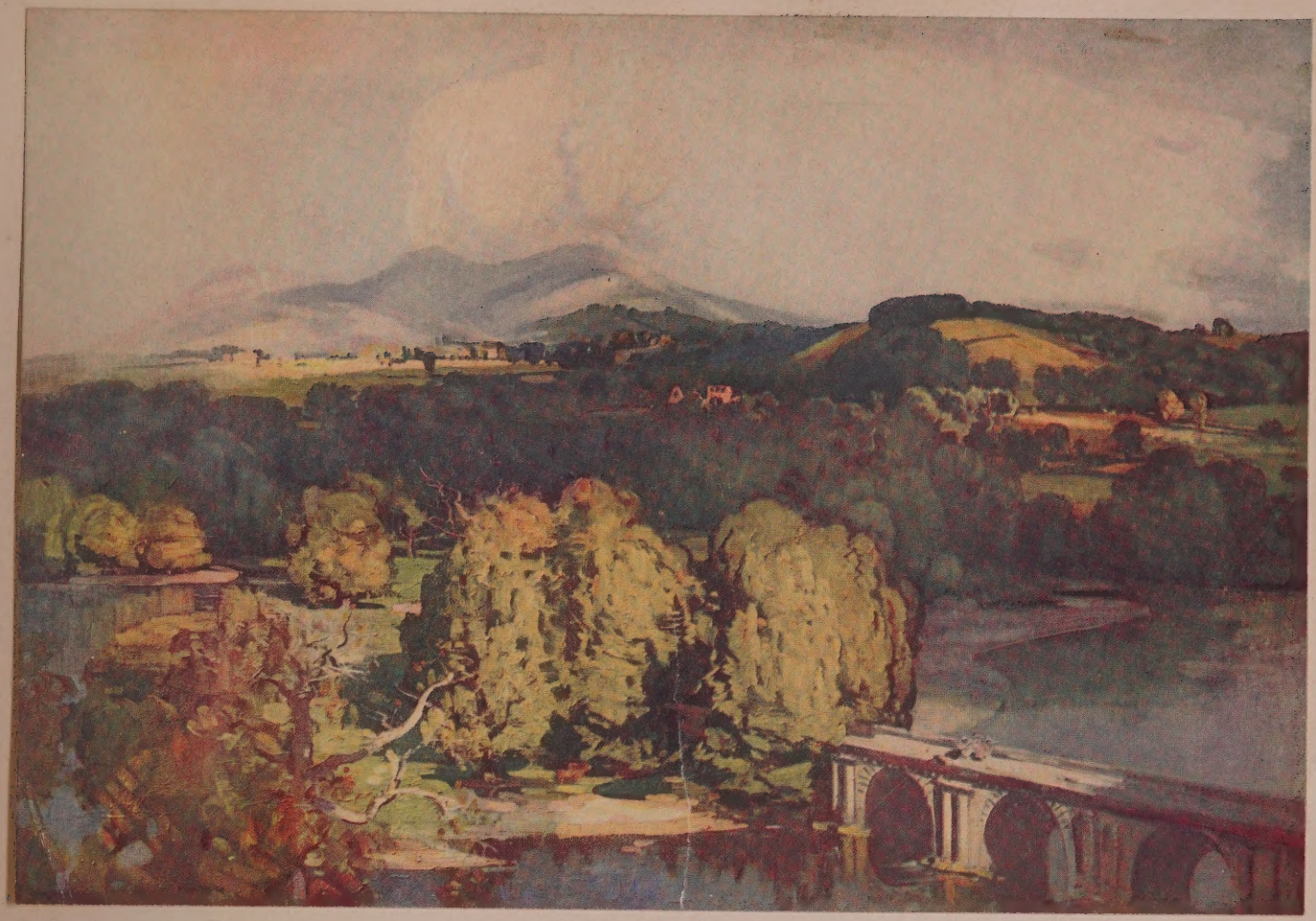

PLATE XXXIV.
4ft. 6in. x 3ft. 6in.

The Border Land.

PLATE XXXV.
8in. x 10in.

Kent Harvest.
In the possession of Sir Baldwin Spencer, Melbourne.

PLATE XXXVI.
36in. x 30in.

Balloons Afire.

ARTHUR STREETON'S AUSTRALIAN WORK

BY LIONEL LINDSAY

NATIONALISM, though it is not an essential, is often an integral part of great art. The Soul of Spain has been wonderfully expressed by Velasquez and Ribera. The Dutch, once they had lifted the burden of oppression, portrayed their native land in a fashion unsurpassed. In Millet was summarized the whole peasantry of France. Turner, though he ranged Europe for subject matter, yet remained faithful to the atmosphere of London; he was romantic and cosmopolitan—a dreamer of dreams. Constable still remains the great Englishman and the national painter. In his inspired rendering of the scenery of his birthplace, the Suffolk farms and vales of Essex, Constable, by his intensity of purpose and passionate sincerity, discovered to his countrymen what we recognize as typical of England—of England and no other place; just as another great national artist, Hiroshige, epitomizes the peculiar and essential beauty of Japan.

We in Australia waited long for our national painter, and whilst he worked among us we failed to recognize this aspect of his genius. Twenty-five years have given us, however, a sense of perspective, and to-day we can see in the landscapes of Arthur Streeton, as in the poetry of Henry Kendall, genuine originality, a quality of race, the inspired vision of the native-born.

I hold no brief for nationalism in art, particularly for that brand patented in the United States and in Germany, which is nothing but a form of priggish self-consciousness, and, at its best, commercial Chauvinism. But when the artist unconsciously makes something representative of his native land, then it is a matter of congratulation for his countrymen.

There is a gaiety, a lightness, in Streeton's work which is in the Australian sunlight itself, and has been expressed by no other artist. It is the expression in paint of the goodness of being alive in this fine land of ours. Actually, it is the first truthful and beautiful rendering of the light and colour and tone of Australia.

Marcus Clarke, a pure cit, and one who ever hungered for the fleshpots of London, created a legend about the "weird

melancholy of the Australian bush," which, like most good lies, will live longer than its desert. Melancholy is a personal quality not to be found in any painter's visualization of Australia. That our landscape is strange and different to that of the old world is no reason why it should be for ever attainted by an alienist evaluation. No Australian born in the bush finds it melancholy. He accepts it visually, as he breathes its native air, without questioning. He may love or hate it—that is, after all, but a private and personal matter—but he will certainly not read into it the melancholia of Clarke unless he has been already contaminated by the famous preface to Gordon's poems.

Our landscape, and particularly our trees, were long maligned by the early colonists, because they lacked the luscious yellows and greens of Europe. The gum-tree was ugly, dull and monotonous; its leafage hard and unsympathetic. The immigrant eye, casting back to the old familiar world, could see no quality save that of curiosity in the new. But the truth is, that there is no landscape in the world so harmonious in tone and colour as that of Australia. It is compounded of greys and bronzes, elusive and difficult to establish in paint.

I remember Mr. Hornel telling me that he expected to be disappointed in the landscape he had left when a child. He had just come from the enchantment of Japan, but was astonished by the delicacy, the aerial colour, the tone perfection of Australia. The opinion of such a cosmopolitan painter, an avowed seeker after colour sensation and fresh from Ceylon and Japan, contains a valuable critical estimate. Our painters have no doubt of the matter: they adore our landscape. But there is ever reassurance in the unbiased and expert opinion that comes from the dweller without our gates.

The spark of art kindles in strange and out of the way places—spontaneously, or by what atavistic shock, who can say? The boy Goya, tending swine in the Asturian mountains, is stirred by the spirit of design; it touches Titian in the village of Pieve di Cadore, and Arthur Streeton in the little Victorian township of Bellarine, where he was born in 1867—a vocational impulse that shall not be denied.

In such a typical Australian village Streeton could have had but the illustrated papers of the day and an occasional picture-book for exemplars. Yet he began painting at an early age, and developed so quickly that by twenty-three he had mastered his medium and painted a great landscape, the picture which bears for its title, "Still Glides the Stream and Shall for ever Glide." As a lad he had worked in a wine and spirit store, afterwards with a soft goods firm; and sad at heart must he have been—he whose happiness was the open air—else the nickname "Smike" by which his contemporaries still call him, was attached to him in the purest spirit of paradox. He toiled as a lithographer with the old firm of Troedel & Co., work which ensured him bread and butter. His emancipation was not achieved until he joined forces with Tom Roberts and Charles Conder at Eaglemont Cottage. Here they kept house for the goddess of landscape, and incidentally established a great movement in Australian art.

Roberts, fresh from Europe, contributed the Bastien Lepage method, the square brushwork, which even at that date had invaded South Kensington. It was known as "la peinture au premier coup," the tint being mixed on the palette and transferred to its allotted space of canvas finally and without further disturbance. It is a very uninteresting method, resulting in flatness and edges like those of tin, but it teaches exactitude in the rendering of colour values. In figure work its weaknesses are painfully evident, but in landscape painting it possesses a certain virtue, obliterating detail, and tending to produce unity.

Conder's contribution was his fine taste. A rare and refined spirit, he had something of a woman's capriciousness in his make-up. He scorned tradition—though in the end he succumbed to the eighteenth century—and discipline he loathed with all the loathing of the colourist who is no draughtsman. For delicate shapes and shades of colour his sense was sure and excellent, and he followed his fancies to the end with almost a mondaine's perversity. His reputation as a painter of Australian landscape rests securely upon "Richmond Farm," now in the possession of its true inspirer, Julian Ashton. In its pinks and delicate blues and yellows, the disposition of the decorative shapes, the twisted and leafless trees—so wilful and beautiful in line,—the tone notes

of geese and pigs and calves all helping the design and conveyance of atmosphere, is epitomized a landscape ideal which was to influence Streeton and modify an outlook hitherto frankly realistic. Julian Ashton, in his article on Conder in the second number of "Art in Australia," is right in stressing the indebtedness of Streeton to his friend. "It was from Conder," he says, "that Streeton learned the value of decorative landscape, and through his influence he began to lay more stress upon selection and design. I do not doubt that Arthur Streeton would be amongst the first to acknowledge his debt to this gifted friend of his early manhood . . . ."

Streeton brought his friends his natural gaiety, his highly trained powers of observation, and his inspiring cleverness. It was a happy destiny that drew these three young artists together. Once the method established and the point of view settled, a strong family likeness is discernible in their earliest essays. Roberts had the most knowledge, Conder the rarest taste, Streeton the greatest dexterity. They painted the open country around Heidelberg, near Melbourne, the Yarra winding among the gentler slops of delicately wooded hills, and, later, Sydney street-scapes—in which Roberts excelled, particularly in those aspects of winter when sudden lights break the melancholy grey of the sky, and reflections in the wet streets grow more brilliant with the approach of night.

It was but natural that James McNeill Whistler, Arbiter Elegantiarum and master of many arts, should become their tutelary god. His "Gentle Art of Making Enemies" was for the elect the gospel of the period. It stood for the fight against stodge and flatulent ignorance, as well as for the creed of painting for its own sake. To-day, we think its influence has gone a little stale, for apart from its peculiar value as a defence of the cosmopolitan in art, and as a revelation of the mind and art of a very subtle soul, we are not edified by the presentment of a fine artist wasting a day upon a splenetic epigram, when he might have used it in the service of beauty. Though Whistler's "Ten O'Clock" rejoiced the heart of youth like a rebel song and set a fashion in aesthetics, its effect upon a certain set of artists was to make them class-conscious, fastidious to the touch of life, with the inevitable result of anaemic preciosity in their work.

Arthur Streeton at his Camp,
Sirius Cove, Mosman,
Taken in 1896.

Streeton was never affected in this way. But Whistler's delicate care in composition, his fine seriousness in developing the atmosphere of the picture, led the Australian artist to arrange his facts to the best advantage, so that he escaped that bugbear of realism—the acceptance of everything in nature as of equal pictorial value; for pure realism inevitably ends in exalting the small facts at the expense of unity.

That Streeton could absorb the qualities of his two friends is proof of his greatness. He profited by whatever came his way, and whatever of knowledge and qualities they might contribute to his power he transfuses in his subconscious vision. And soon he leaves them, having his metier to his hand, and his landscape sense fixed. Painting always out of doors, he forgets Whistler and artists. Nature is now his only teacher, and in daily intercourse with her his command over colour values increases with his ability to cover a larger surface, to handle a big canvas with the same ease as he would a panel.

I have always felt the lyrical outburst in Streeton's Australian work. The mood in which it is conceived is a singing mood. It tells of the sheer good spirits of "golden lads and lasses," and the joy of being abroad in the sunlight. An out-of-door feeling pervades it as if the painter had a strain of the gipsy in his blood, and was irked and fretted by townsfolk and the town.

It wears no air of consciousness, except perhaps a sprightly grace. No thought seems to have disturbed the painter's vision of the good world. It seems to say with the Arab, "God is good." How delicate the film of distant mountains; how light and bracing the warm air, and the scent of dried grasses; how subtle and sweet! Were ever trees more to the purpose of a painter than these gums and river oaks, so elegant, so varied in their grace? The river rivals the sky for depth and rarity of blue. The little clouds that rise at the call of noon flit and fade into its serenity. Surely this were El Dorado, the golden land where thought may never cast its shadow upon the souls of men, but for the distant farmsteads there to hint that someone must be working for the world! And truly there is no premeditation in Streeton's early work, so much is he in love with nature, so sure the teaching of

his eyes, and so faithful his taste, that he seems to have done it all by instinct, as a bird builds its nest.

Yet Streeton never succumbed to that worship of fact which, in the scientific impressionist, destroyed the passion of the creator and made him a mere transcriber of colour sensation. The French Impressionists were pure archivists of Nature, they would document her from dawn till set of sun, with the same passionless energy—priests of impersonality. We scent in their product the daily task, not the labour of joy, and of their effort we ask in vain —What of the man who has spoken in this work? For "style is the man," as Buffon wrote, and style, the cut of the artist's soul, is so generally confused with mannerism and technical aptitude.

I attribute Streeton's escape from the maelstrom of materialism to his gaiety of soul; the joy he experienced he gave again to art with a grace all his own. Two other qualities also assisted—charm of composition and the ability to select. For the first he owed a debt to Whistler and Conder, the second was an instinct for fit material, innate like his rare sense of colour.

Streeton was impressionist in the larger and literal sense of the word, but he bent reality to a pictorial purpose. In all his work you feel and recognize individuality. And here it is interesting to note how little of personality emerges from the mass of impressionist work—and how could it be otherwise when the painter has relinquished his birthright for a poor pottage of logic?

Already taste has turned against the document in paint, and a study is no longer regarded as a finished work of art. The test is no longer—How near has the painter got to Nature? but—How has he revealed himself in demanding from Nature the secret of her beauty? Nature, even on her most beautiful occasions, is distant and unapproachable as a goddess. She cares nothing for man, though man is capable of stamping the image of his soul upon her infinite bullion . . . .

The characteristic of Australian landscape is light, for the sun rules the sky a full three-fourths of the year. Fine colour we have at the birth and passing of day, and man has never wearied of voicing their poetry. Dawn that stirs delicately with the birds,

and bursts with the gigantic beauty of increscent light upon the waking world; sunset with its far-flung gold and cerements of glory—the hour of the poet and the campanile. There is hope in the uprushing light of the dawn; reverie and dream in the horizontal light of evening. But there is also the hard poetry of noon—the poetry of vertical light that smites Thor-like upon the summer hills, blanching the plains and drying the river in its courses. It is the poetry of this hard, this typical Australian light, whose keynote is clarity and precision of tone, that Streeton was the first to perceive and embody in the absolute of art.

Heysen and Gruner have both attacked this problem, each from a different angle of vision: Gruner, by painting into the eye of the light, analysing delicately the greys and violets and the translucencies of green; Heysen, by transparencies of shadow and monumental chiaroscuro and design. But Streeton took perhaps the most difficult course. The problem could only be solved by employing the full medium of oil paint. And Streeton attacked it squarely, rendering exact colour values and their irradiant light, set in the full blaze of the summer sun.

I cannot but think that the magnificent Dinet, "The Snake Charmer," in the Sydney Gallery, helped Streeton in realizing the atmosphere of summer. Sunlight has rarely been so magnificently rendered as in this characteristic group of Arabs. I know of no realistic picture wherein the centering (here, upon the old man's head) is so beautifully achieved without trick. The light beats and dazzles; the atmosphere vibrates; the reflections from the sand are astonishingly subtle. But, whether helped by Dinet or his own instincts, Streeton was happy in pitching his key neither too high, which would have blanched his colour, nor yet so low as to lose in light what he might have gained in richness. He pursued instinctively the happy medium, for with all his gay dexterity there was an almost French truthfulness in Streeton's vision of Nature.

Atmosphere, the colour of objects modified by weather conditions, this was the witch that hag-rode the painters of the last half of the nineteenth century.

In the old landscapes (save the Dutch) the lights were warm,

Lieut. Arthur Streeton.
Official Australian War Artist.
From a Photograph taken in 1918
by Elliott & Fry, London.

and the trees brown harmonies, but plein-airists saw that (except in the flush of sunset) the lights were cool, and the shadows permeated with the reflected colour of the sky. For long it was a fight between the blue and violet shadow. The human eye, for all its boasted independence, is but a servant of the mind, and it determines according to its colour predilection. Streeton, whose use of blue is masterly and unique, comes well from the struggle, though in "Fire's On" the blue of the sky seems to-day a little insistent and wanting in atmospheric depth. In his big Hawkesbury picture, with its deep blue foreground, he used its profound reflected value with rare art, for the greying of the vast distances depends upon its tonic accompaniment.

The foreground has been ever the crux in landscape painting. The Dutch masters, building upon a concavity, developed their landscapes inwards, using the architecture of the clouds and the structure of the foreground to drive the eye into the lights and the centre of interest. For all the apparent naturalness of their work, this entailed not a little art, a clever compromise with matter. Turner warmed his foregrounds to put back his distances and to cool them. Literalists elaborated them, and failed by distracting the attention from the point of interest. Arbitrary painters left them sketchy and undeveloped. Corot made a bold change by eliminating the near foreground, making his lower pitch upon the edge of the middle distance, where form becomes vague and less insistent.

Streeton generally accepted the Barbizon innovation. In painting his extreme and middle distances he never faltered, but the problem of what to do with a devil of a foreground has needed at times all his magic. In the water pieces, and in the open country flats, evasion of the foreground difficulty is easy, on account of the surfaces presented. But Streeton, who had early recognized his limitations, avoided with the wisdom of the serpent all subjects in which near forms demand serious and close study.

No one can paint a distance like him. Bear witness his noblest work, "The Purple Noon's Transparent Light." He has the Corbie's keenness of sight, yet he never overstresses the drawing entailed. Every touch here is sure and revelant of character. There is

no painting into wet colour, no fumbling with the indefinite, yet in that precision of touch there dwells a mystery of value and light more profound than any romantic formula for the evasion of drawing. Here it is that truth is beautiful, because directed to such fine purpose. This is the sole use of reality, bent to a pictorial purpose and controlled by a rare and original taste. Who but Streeton, gazing up the Hawkesbury River from the terrace across those far-stretched plains, could have imaged what he saw? To divine the possibilities of a picture, its shapes and lighting, its character and composition in that wide field, required the intuition of genius. It was virgin landscape, untouched of any brush. He possessed no formula, no precedent to rest upon—only his vision; but that, developed by continuous painting in the open, was ready to resolve its difficulties. When he had finished it, I doubt whether Streeton was aware of the importance of his accomplishment, yet to-day this picture stands by itself amongst the world's landscapes, because of its remarkable individuality. Australians cannot place too high a value upon it. Its claim to beauty is incontestably established. But it is something more than a work of beauty. It is a great portrait of our birth-place, and blazons high the claim of Arthur Streeton to the status of a great national painter.

That rare writer, J. H. M. Abbott, in describing his impression of the Hawkesbury country from an aeroplane, has established the connection so finely that I take a great pleasure in setting his description by the side of Streeton's masterpiece. Says Mr. Abbott: "But the main consideration to an Australian when he is flying a mile above the Hawkesbury Valley is that he is taking as comprehensive a glance as it is possible to take of the cradle of his race. Down below, along the banks of the twisting yellow river that meanders from mountain to mountain, through the well-defined angle of alluvial that makes up the famous district, is the land that bred the Australians. Not the sandstone and pipeclay of Port Jackson, or the ridges around Parramatta, or the pastures of the Upper Nepean, or anywhere else in the whole continent, can claim to have suckled at its bosom the new man-child who was born at the commencement of the nineteenth

century. That is the claim of "Mother Oxberry" alone . . . It is not the scenery that is so inspiring down there. The clouds are the finest scenery when you are high aloft, and the earth is at best a patchwork quilt. It is the whole sentiment of the place, the awe it fills you with, the esteem and affection that you must possess for the land that bred you, be you never so unworthy of it. For whether you come from the Hunter, or the Western District of Victoria, or Darling Downs or Spencer's Gully, or Albany Sound, or the Valley of the Derwent, when you have come to the Hawkesbury you have come home. This is your final spot, the nucleus of your land, the heart of your country. It should be the Mecca of Australians."

If ever this idea of Holy Land should be realized by the Australian mind, Streeton's Hawkesbury masterpieces will have already glimpsed the visible god. It is impossible to visit the Hawkesbury country without seeing that he has portrayed its character with the insight of genius, and ever after, when you wish to recall to mind this cradle of our race, you will not remember its actuality, but only Streeton's pictures.

"In Fire's On," "Purple Noon," "The Hawkesbury River," "Golden Summer," "Gloucester Buckets" and innumerable Harbour pieces, Streeton has established his claim to "pictures patent," which John Constable said "should be the aim of the artist; —to bring something to light out of Nature for the first time, something like that for which in mechanics a patent would be granted."

Nothing can shake Streeton's position in Australian art. Though his fame rests upon half a dozen of his larger landscapes, it is enough to establish his leadership and the fashion of his mind. The finest tribute ever paid to his charm came from Hilder when he said, "I would give all my romance for a piece of Arthur Streeton's beautiful realism."

BLACK AND WHITE REPRODUCTIONS OF PAINTINGS

PLATE XXXVII.

Heidelberg, Vic.
In the possession of M. McMichael, Esq., Melbourne.

PLATE XXXVIII.

Corfe Castle.
Exhibited at Royal Academy, 1909

PLATE XXXIX.

Rouen, 1912.
Exhibited at International Exhibition,
Venice, 1912-13.

PLATE XL

Victoria Tower, Westminster.
Exhibited at Royal Academy, London, 1911.

PLATE XLI

Luigi Polishing the Bronze.
1909.

PLATE XLII.

The Grand Canal, Venice.
Exhibited at New English Art Club, 1908.
In the possession of Robert Mond, Esq.,
Surrey, Eng.

PLATE XLIII.

Melrose Abbey.
Exhibited at International Exhibition,
Venice, 1912-13.

PLATE XLIV.

Kelso Bridge.
1912.
In the possession of Mrs. Smith,
Brighton, Vic.

PLATE XLV

Corfe Castle,

PLATE XLVI.

Bruges Canal.
In the possession of Peter Waite, Esq,
Adelaide.

PLATE XLVII.

Cathedral, Bruges.
In the possession of Peter Waite, Esq., Adelaide.

PLATE XLVIII.

Bomb Officers' "Posy," Glisy.

This and the remaining Plates are reproductions of paintings made on the Western Front during the War.

PLATE XLIX.

Amiens Cathedral.

PLATE L. Big Boche Guns near Chuignolles.

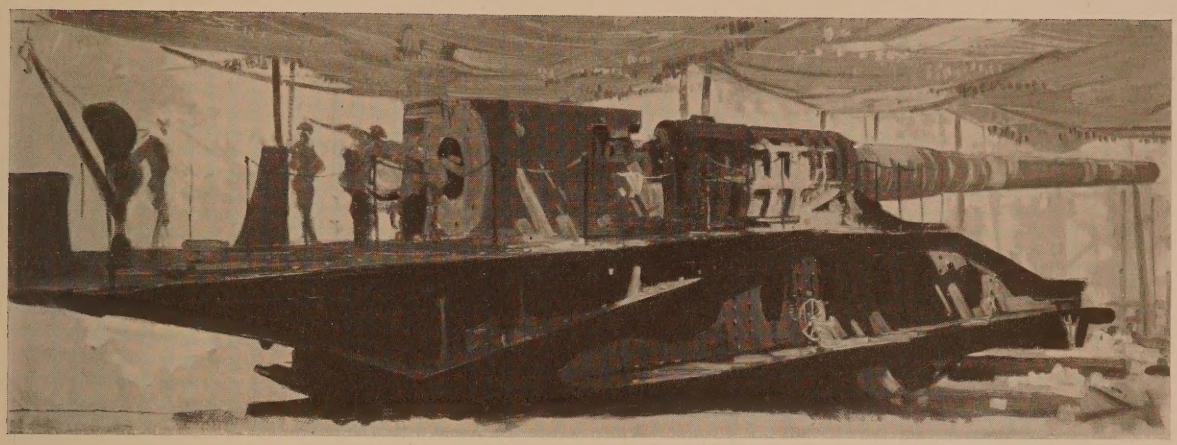

PLATE LI. Big French Gun at Blangy, Tronville.

PLATE LII.

Villers Bretonneux,
on 25th April, 1918.

PLATE LIII.

Dressing Station.
Smith's Farm, Corbie.

PLATE LIV.

Dingbat Alley, Peronne,
Moonlight.

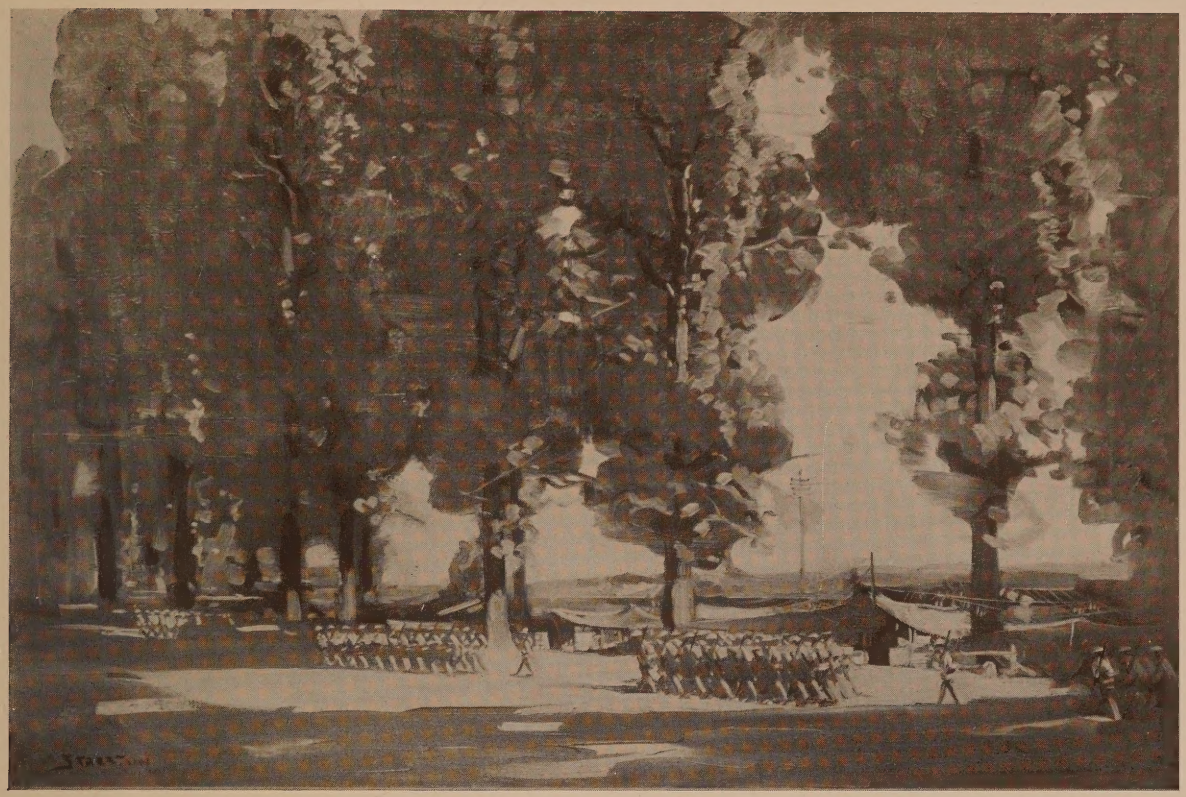

PLATE LV.

5th Division going in near Lahoussoye.

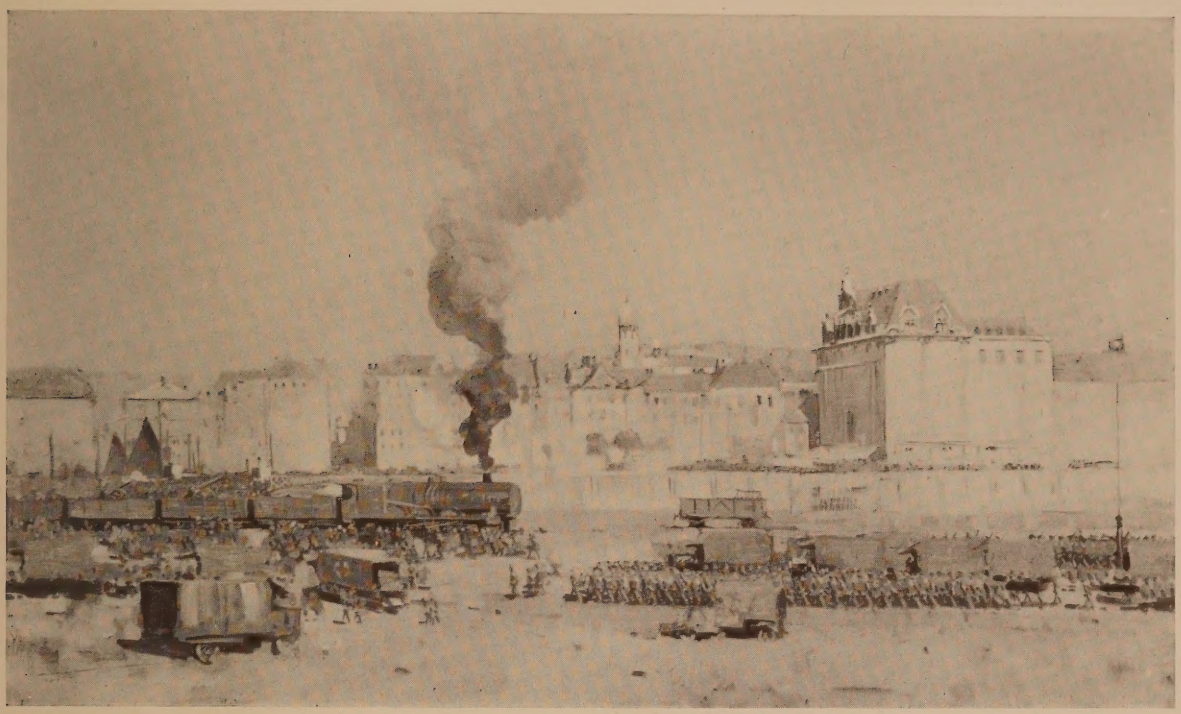

PLATE LVI.

Boulogne, 1918.

ARTHUR STREETON'S ENGLISH PAINTINGS

BY P. G. KONODY

ARTHUR STREETON'S landscapes have been for many years such familiar features at English Art exhibitions, that those who are not acquainted with the biographical data of the painter's career have come to regard him as an English landscape painter who devotes himself, like the majority of his kind, to the recording of English scenery, with an occasional excursion to France, or to Venice, that shimmering pearl of the Adriatic, in search of relaxation or fresh impressions. It entails quite an effort of memory to recall Streeton's first appearance before the London public. Unless my memory is at fault, this happened just twenty years ago, when the Trustees of the National Gallery of New South Wales organized the first comprehensive London exhibition of Australian art at the Grafton Galleries. Streeton's "The Purple Noon's Transparent Light," accompanied by nine other pictures from his brush, then came upon us as a delightful revelation of personal vision and sound technical accomplishment. I do not mean to say that his work had not previously figured at the Royal Academy and kindred shows, but his reputation in England may be affirmed to date from 1898, when he became established in public estimation as the premier exponent of Australian landscape art.

A sensitive landscape painter is inevitably far more subject to the influence of his surroundings than a painter of figure or "subject" pictures. With the latter, the result of tradition and training is more likely to remain permanent, wherever he may happen to pitch his tent. The landscape painter, who is more often than not self-trained, relies more on personal observation. For the portrait painter it is really immaterial whether his studio be in Sydney or in Paris, in New York or in London; his style is formed by schooling. Not so the modern landscape painter's, which is, or ought to be, the result of local conditions of light and atmosphere. It is thus not surprising that with his change of domicile, Arthur Streeton completely changed his style. The man who had been the Australian landscape painter par excel-

lence was gradually transformed into a typical English landscape painter. There are some artists who approach nature in a spirit of parti pris. Albert Goodwin is perhaps the most striking example. Such painters are apt to force nature into a preconceived formula. Their observation is confined to the topographical features of the scene, upon which colour and atmosphere are so arbitrarily imposed that the tropics and the polar zone become identical.

Arthur Streeton is emphatically not of that race. His early style was formed under Australian skies. The wide horizons are suffused with mellow light. A golden haze, soft and balmy, hangs like a transparent veil over hill and valley. There are no emphatic colour notes in this sunny yet somewhat sombre world of pale gold or straw, grey and grey-blue. Then, too, Australia is a new country and lacks the romance of an historic past. Its beauty is purely visual, without any intellectual associations. Streeton's excellence as a painter of Australian landscapes consists in a complete, and, as it were, impersonal surrender to this visual charm. In England he contracted a graver mood, due partly to the darker colouring, partly to romantic associations, such as those of historic buildings and picturesque ruins that whisper yet their tale of a wild and splendid past.

Streeton approached these new subjects without prejudice. He never looked upon English landscapes through Australian spectacles, but surrendered himself completely to the emotions evoked by these unfamiliar scenes. He worked in every part of the country—in England, in Scotland, and in Wales, showing everywhere a preference for subjects rich in that element of architectural romance which he found lacking in the scenes of his earlier activity. I can recall his paintings of Kelso Abbey and Edinburgh Castle, of the mighty pile of Chepstow Castle, tinged by the rose of the sunset glow (now in the collection of Mr. Walter Barnett); of the Victoria Tower, Westminster, surrounded by picturesque slums long since cleared away; of Trafalgar Square seen through the murk of a winter afternoon—one of the most fascinating poetic studies of mysterious atmosphere ever produced by his prolific brush.

Needless to say, not all his pictures concentrate on architectural features. Many of them are pure landscape, or landscape with architectural adjuncts in a subordinate place, as in the imposing and spacious "Borderland," near Melrose Abbey, with the Eildon Hills in the distance and the winding Tweed in the foreground. In such paintings, Streeton finds his romance in the contrasts of light and dark—clumps of elm trees in dark hollows, standing out against sunlit fields or meadows, massive clouds towering over hill and dale, variety of form and of colour, in the place of the unifying haze of his Australian pictures.

But is the direct influence of the surroundings the only cause of the complete change in Streeton's art after his departure from Australia? I think not. There is something in his more recent work which cannot be altogether ascribed to the change of milieu. At the time of Streeton's Australian activity, he was working in a land which had practically no artistic tradition. In a way this was an advantage, in that neither he nor his fellow-workers had the clearness of their vision dimmed by the formulas of schools. He relied upon his eyes, and took nature as he found her. This attitude in itself constitutes a kind of impressionism, and it is not surprising that Streeton should have felt attracted by the great French impressionists, whose theories he, in conjunction with Conder and Roberts, advocated and, to a certain extent, practised in Australia. In England he found, not only the surprise and delightful shock of an entirely new visual experience, but also, in spite of all the various contending modern influences, a time-honoured tradition, which did not fail to draw him within its net.

I know nothing of Streeton's studies of the masters of landscape painting, nothing of his visits to museums and private galleries, nothing of his likes and dislikes as regards other artists' work, but after comparing his Australian landscapes with his more recent work in England, I arrive at the conviction that the English tradition, and more particularly the tradition of Constable, has left its mark on the Australian painter's development. He is no longer unsophisticated. He does not any longer accept things as they are. He does not altogether concentrate his will upon the rendering of the impression regardless of the technical means by

which it is rendered. No—he now arrives at deliberate effects. His humility is gone. He wants to be the master, not the servant of nature. With increasing energy and breadth of brushwork, he began, apparently, to think as much of the manner as of the matter—perhaps more of the manner than of the matter. I even suspect him at times of deliberate interference with the rhythm of nature to make it conform to his own sense of rhythm.

This attitude is bound to lead to a certain kind of generalization for purely decorative ends. Paint, applied with swaggering sureness, is made to tell and to please as paint, not as a medium for conveying some fragment of truth. Take the very effective group of trees in the foreground of the "Borderland" picture. I defy anybody—even the artist himself—to say what particular species of tree is here represented. I am not finding fault with him for what may be a serious shortcoming of his picture in the eyes of, say, a botanist. Presumably Streeton was not interested in the anatomy of these trees, which were there merely to supply him with a strong mass where the mass was needed. But the instance quoted serves to emphasize the point I wish to make: that Streeton is no longer a realist or an impressionist: that he has absorbed certain British conventions, and that he is veering in the direction of a more purely decorative style; or, to put it quite concisely, Streeton has ceased to be an Australian landscape painter, and has become, in his art an Englishman. It is not for me or for anyone else to say whether he has gained or lost in the process. The answer to such a question will depend entirely upon the point of view taken by him who ventures to lay down the law of artistic perfection.

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